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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001400

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KISL I2

SUBJECT: FRIDAY MOSQUE SERMONS HIGHLIGHT ISCI-SADR ANIMOSITY

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Since the escalation of hostilities between the GOI and the Sadrists in late-March, samplings of Friday sermons from ISCI and Sadrists-affiliated mosques throughout Iraq reveal a growing gulf between the two parties.

Whereas the majority of ISCI mosques praised the GOI's initial crackdown on JAM Special Groups (SG) in Basrah and the

subsequent campaign in Sadr City, Sadrists mosques have ratcheted up their criticism of the GOI. A review of Friday, May 2 sermons from two of the most influential mosques in Baghdad, the ISCI-affiliated Buratha mosque in Kadhamiyah and the Sadrists-controlled al-Hikmah mosque in Sadr City, illustrates the differing perspectives. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Beginning with the Charge of Knights campaign in Basrah, samplings of ISCI and Sadrists mosques throughout Iraq indicate that the ongoing hostilities between the GOI and the Sadrists has been viewed in completely different terms by the two largest blocs of the UIA, ISCI and the Sadr Trend.

Whereas ISCI mosques have praised the GOI's campaign as a legitimate act of the state to maintain order and halt the illegal activities of JAM SG and other criminal elements, the message from Sadrists mosques has been the complete opposite. Claiming the martyr's role, they believe the GOI fears that they will emerge triumphant in the upcoming provincial elections, and the two main blocs of the UIA, Dawa and ISCI, are conspiring with Coalition Forces (CF) to prevent this from happening.

¶3. (C) In his Friday, May 2, sermon at the ISCI-affiliated Buratha mosque, Shaykh Jalal al-Din Saghir, an ISCI-bloc COR member and purported leader within the Badr Organization, clearly illustrated the ISCI perspective. Urging Iraqis to support the GOI's campaign to improve security and respect for the law, he praised the "large strides in the field of maintaining security and enforcing the law," that GOI security services have already achieved. In a swipe at the Sadrists, Saghir said that "opposition should always be peaceful to serve the interests of the people." Alluding to the support that the Iranians have been giving the Sadrists, Saghir delivered another jab, stating that: "Anyone who wants to sell himself to the other states will find out that these states are very generous. However, he should not say that he has dignity."

4.(C) In contrast, Imam Mohammed al-Battati, a reputed JAM leader, delivered a much different sermon at the Sadrists-controlled al-Hikmah mosque. Sounding common Sadrists themes, al-Battati criticized the GOI as a puppet of the CF, and condemned the corruption in the GOI. Decrying the failure of the government to provide the people of Sadr City with essential services, al-Battati claimed that the people of Sadr City want the Sadrists, not the GOI, to rule them. He also "clarified" a directive from Muqtada al-Sadr, stating that JAM members should not attack GOI and CF forces within Sadr City, but were free to continue their attacks in other parts of Baghdad and Iraq.

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